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DAILY INTERLAKE

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Insulation listing scrutinized

The Daily Inter Lake

Sen. Max Baucus, D-Mont., will be in Libby today to talk with residents and officials about an Environmental Protection Agency proposal to declare vermiculite-based insulation used in Libby homes as a hazardous material.

Meanwhile, the EPA's top executives are meeting in a closed session today with W.R. Grace officials in Washington, D.C., to talk about the same proposal. If approved, it would for the first time name Grace's once-popular Zonolite insula-

tion as a hazardous product.

Grace's vermiculite mine at Libby produced the raw material for the insulation, and labeling the insulation as hazardous carries potentially expensive national implications.

Up to 15 million homes nationwide are insulated with Zonolite. The cost of removal is estimated at \$3,000 to \$20,000 per house.

The public-health emergency declaration has been in the works since last September, when EPA Administrator Christine Whitman traveled to Libby to listen to community concerns.

Baucus will meet with staff

at the Center for Asbestos Related Diseases at 3 p.m. to discuss ongoing health-care and asbestos screening efforts.

Asbestos was a toxic byproduct from the vermiculite mining process and is blamed for widespread death and sickness among Libby area residents. The mine closed in 1990, but lingering contamination is now the focus of Superfund cleanup.

At 4 p.m. in the library basement, Baucus meets with the Community Advisory Group, members of the local carpenter's union and the public to talk about the insulation proposal.